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EARLY EDITION

TIM COLLINS, THE GAZETTE

Seun Kuti, accompanied by his late father's band, the legendary Egypt 80, played an energetic show to a full Ste. Catherine Street crowd last night.

SEUN KUTI Son of Africa plays to a gathering of the global tribes

CONTINUED FROM D1

Kalakuta Show rolled out even more bottom, with added sax contributing to the rising momentum and complexity.

And as always, the global tribes gathered. Mildred and Darwin Wilson hail from Baltimore. This is their first festival.

"I was in the military stationed in Europe," said Darwin, "and have always enjoyed jazz.

"We're hard-core jazz fans, but there's music here from all over the world. The live entertainment here is awesome, especially when you don't have to spend $60."

Asked about last night's show, he said "We saw them at soundcheck. They're going to pump them up."

Others had even more reason to gather and celebrate. Simon Allerdice is from Wellington, New Zealand.

His wife, Viviane Ouaiou, is a Montrealer originally from the Ivory Coast.

"We met in New Zealand," he said, "and we live here now. I'm waiting for my immigration papers so we can live here and raise a family in such a great place."

They come to the festival "because there's such community spirit. I have friends from around the globe who come to this," Simon said. "It's a world-class event."

It always is, and as the evening lengthened under iffy but holding skies, Africa was in the house.

NOTES FROM THE FESTIVAL

Cowboy Junkies were splendid without their special guests

SATURDAY:

By his own count, alto saxophonist **David Binney** has played 11 times at past jazz festivals, but his gig Saturday night at the Gesù was his first with his own band. And what a concert it was – two hours of great interplay with Binney's energetic attack and idea rich changes the focal point. The full house listened intently to his rich soloing, enhanced by a terrific support group – pianist Craig Taborn, bassist Scott Colley, and Brian Blade – easily one of the most imaginative drummers on the scene today. (Just ask Wayne Shorter, who for years now uses Blade in his quartet). There was an underground feel to the ensemble, tastefully delivered, accessible and above all, powerful.

Binney brought the same quality when he guested Sunday night with the François Bourassa Quartet at The Spectrum. He took the quartet to a higher level of creativity – it sizzled rather than simply cooking. And again, drummer Greg Ritchie, trained in Montreal but now working in New York, was a key figure in the group's driving force, with a variety of percussive techniques that seemed to flow naturally.

IRWIN BLOCK

SUNDAY

"You never know what language to speak when you're playing in Montreal," said **Stefano Bollani** after the opening numbers of his electrifying solo piano concert at the Gesù on Sunday night, before he delivered intros in Italian, French, English, Portuguese and pidgin German. Similarly his musical references were all across the map in a dense, lightning fast attack, often propelled by a sense of melodramatic pre-monition (massive slightly dissonant block chords or needle-and-pins tightwire runs on the upper register). He was obsessively methodical in refracting melodies, and when he asked for audience requests and put them all together in a seamless medley, the connections between styles and time frames (however far-fetched, like Italianate ragtime) became breathtakingly illuminated within the tradition of pure entertainment.

JUAN RODRIGUEZ

"It's our first time in Montreal," **Boots Riley**, leader of Oakland political rap act the **Coup** told Sunday's late-night Club Soda crowd. "We're not gonna do anything special – we just want to funk the hell outta this club." Bingo. Backed by a stunningly tight three-piece band (guitar, bass, drums) and powerhouse-pipe-endowed back-up singer (**Silk E**) – but without Coup DJ **Pam the Funkstress** – Riley ploughed through his 15-year back-catalogue, giving every song a gritty funk-rock makeover. He is a consummately charismatic front man, establishing his as one of the best live rap acts going, after Philadelphia untouchables the **Roots**.

TCHA DUNLEVY

Montreal pianist **François Bourassa Quartet's** concert at the Spectrum on Sunday came 24 hours after his special guest, New York alto saxophonist David Binney, performed magic at the Gesù – and the segue was a natural: both are forward-looking composers who weave lean elastic lines through smart, sophisticated structures. Add longtime Bourassa tenor man **André Leroux** to the mix, with his pungent strains of Coltrane spirituality and funk, alongside industrious **Greg Richie** on drums and steadfast bassist **Guy Boisvert** (his longest collaborator, at over 20 years), and this was a splendidly cohesive whirlwind of movement. There's a dynamic range in Bourassa's small combo compositions that's virtually orchestral, and the great sense of occasion in the performances made them soar.

JUAN RODRIGUEZ

We went to hear **Thomas Carbon** – as in, not to see him, because the MMMS Tent at Ste. Catherine St. and Clark was packed past its canvas awning. Based on sound alone, one expected to see a bassist and perhaps 2 guitarists; but the crowd briefly parted revealing only Carbon on 8-string and loop-effects box. As is always the case with soloists with technology on the side, he was a little too fond of his toy, but the hypno-finger-picking compensated. The real star may be the Tent itself.

MARK LEPAGE

MONDAY

The "special guests" thing didn't work out so well for Cowboy Junkies at their 20th-anniversary Spectrum show. For starters, Garth Hudson, the Band's brilliant accordion and keyboard player, was a no-show. According to Margo Timmins, who delivered the bad news from the stage, he was detained at the airport. Ron Sexsmith did join the group for four numbers, but the combination proved an awkward one – particularly on a woefully-underrehearsed Someday Soon. But there was more than a silver lining: the Junkies show was so near perfect that outside help was not needed. The concert, which featured some old favourites and material from the group's latest disc, At the End of Paths Taken, was split between acoustic and electric sets. Both were beautifully paced, with Timmins in fine voice and brother Michael producing alarming bursts of inspired noise from his guitar. Magic.

BERNARD PERUSSE

In a concert that linked guitarist Mike Stern's Invitation Series residence to bassist Richard Bona's four-night stay, which starts tonight, the two musicians were joined by trumpet player Roy Hargrove and drummer Dave Weckl for a free-for-all, genre-spanning show would have gone off the tracks in less competent hands. As it was, though, whether the makeshift quartet was playing straight jazz, a funk-fusion variant, four-on-the-floor rock or world music, they pretty much nailed it. A sense of genuine camaraderie onstage didn't hurt the atmosphere, either. Particularly memorable was a spirited performance of Miles Davis's It's About That Time, which evolved into a vocal-with-tape-loop tour de force by Bona. "I've been here for five nights, and I've had sooooo much fun," Stern told his audience at the conclusion of the show.

BERNARD PERUSSE

Swiss composer keyboardist Nik Bartsch, leader of "Zen-funk" band Ronin, was a little tired before his show at Cabaret on Monday. The previous night he performed in Vancouver and, the night before, in Germany. All towards a brief U.S. debut in New York City yesterday and then back to Zurich the following day. Switzerland's status as European crossroads may have prepared Bartsch for the compressed global push. Its music scene is both compact and wide open aesthetically, thanks to its many jazz schools and conservatories, adventurous labels like HatHut, Unit and Intakt, and cities within reach through a transportation system that works like, oh, clockwork. The result is a klatch of highly educated and "open" musicians who seem supremely positioned to blend elements of jazz, classical and electronica into a Third Stream for the 21st century.

JUAN RODRIGUEZ

JOHN MORSTAD, THE GAZETTE

Stefano Bollani's solo piano concert at the Gésu Theatre on Sunday was electrifying.

THE GAZETTE

Margo Timmins and The Cowboy Junkies on Monday: nearly perfect by themselves.

Jazz fest: the facts

The Montreal International Jazz Festival runs through July 8. Admission to outdoor shows is free. Tickets for indoor concerts are available through Ticketpro (514-908-9090, www.ticketpro.ca) and Admission (514-790-1245, www.admission.com). Depending on the venue, tickets may also be available at individual box offices. The 178-page official program, which should be in every house, contains all the information you'll need. Pick one up free of charge at the Spectrum, Place des Arts and at concert halls where shows will take place. SAQ outlets, most downtown hotels and major book and music stores also carry it. For more info, call 514-871-1881 or go to www.montrealjazzfest.com.

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